

Baltimore County Health Department provides many services to the uninsured and under-insured through sliding-scale fee clinics, nurse visits to homeless shelters, mental health outreach teams for the homeless, partnerships with the Medical and Dental Societies that provide free or reduced-fee services, and enrollment in the Maryland Children's Health Program. In addition, during the past year a collaboration with Kaiser Permanente enrolled 300 individuals in The Partnership, a program that offers a comprehensive medical package to eligible uninsured residents for a small monthly fee. This program filled to capacity immediately and a waiting list grew so large that it had to be closed.

Transportation

Due to the configuration and size of Baltimore County (over 600 squares miles) transportation remains a major barrier for individuals without access to private vehicles. Most MTA buses in Baltimore County are routed through the city, so that a person on the west side (e.g., Randallstown) of the county must take a bus into the city and transfer one or more times to get to the central section (Towson) of the county. Where it would take about 20 minutes in a car, this process may take up to two hours by public transportation. Such constraints make it impractical for many individuals to keep medical appointments.

Language/Cultural Differences

In Baltimore County, there has been an influx of foreign-language speaking immigrants in recent years (see map). During the five year period 1992-1996, there were 4,546 immigrants who spoke Russian, Hindi, Chinese, Hausa, or Korean. Altogether there have been 12,583 international migrants since 1990. Many cannot speak English and interpreters are scarce. This situation leads to inaccurate information-sharing, refusal and/or delay of treatment, and occasionally altercations - (One member of an immigrant family was severely beaten for conversing with a public health nurse, since others thought she was revealing information to an immigration official). The deaf population is another population with special needs, as few health care workers use sign language.

